



Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Implementation Concept Austria

Based on the “Gothenburg Consensus Paper”¹, GÖG/ÖBIG (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH / Geschäftsbereich Österreichisches Bundesinstitut für Gesundheitswesen) defines HIA as follows: *„Health Impact Assessment is a systematic process to analyse und evaluate planned policy initiatives in view of their possible positive and negative effects on health as well as the distribution of these effects within the population. HIA is designed to inform policy decisions and promote Health in All Policies.”*²

The development of an Austrian concept for implementing HIA had been commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Health in 2009 (since 2016: Federal Ministry of Health and Women's Affairs) and formulated by Gesundheit Österreich GmbH / ÖBIG. The project was intended to draft the possibilities for the implementation of HIA on national level – based on international and Austrian experiences and consideration of the national framework.

The project started with a research and analysis of theory, international (implementation) experiences and initial position in Austria. Centrepieces of this analysis were interviews with experts and public servants working in federal ministries, related to the health and wellbeing of the Austrians. Results showed that HIA was more or less unknown; only a few experts were acquainted with the issue. However, on national and regional level interest concerning HIA has been rising. International experiences with HIA as well as Austrian experiences with strategic environmental assessments enable conclusions for the development of effective strategies for implementing and using HIA in Austria.

The concept for implementing HIA in Austria was developed by following a model, well established in the health sector. As implementing HIA is a long-term process, the five pillars of the Capacity-Building-Model (organizational development, development of human resources, resource assignment, leadership, partnership) were extended by four implementation phases (awareness, adoption, implementation, institutionalisation; compare figure 1). For each pillar and each phase, specific targets were defined and implementation strategies were identified. Following this system, it was possible to derive activities necessary for establishing HIA in Austria.

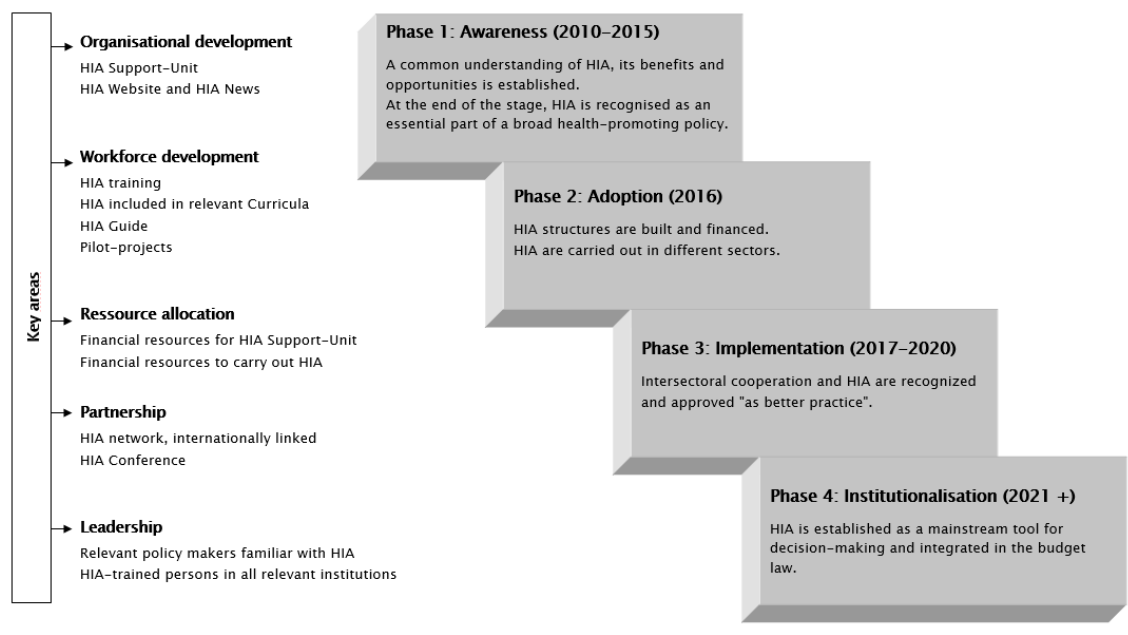
1

ECHP (1999): Health Impact Assessment. Main concepts and suggested approach. Gothenburg consensus paper. European Centre for Health Policy, WHO Regional Office for Europe. Brussels

2

Horvath, I.; Haas, S.; Knaller, C.; Sax, G.(2010): Health Impact Assessment. Konzept zur Etablierung von HIA in Österreich. Im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Gesundheit. Gesundheit Österreich GmbH. Wien

Figure 1: Phases for HIA in Austria and corresponding timeframes



Source: Horvath et al. 2010

The developed concept presents suggestions about the central basic points regarding content and structure, thus defining the general frame for HIA in Austria. In a first step, testing and introducing of the instrument HIA are suggested to concentrate on national level and political intentions. Additionally, the instrument HIA is recommended to follow a prospective approach. This means that the execution of HIA should be embedded in the planning phase of a project. It is regarded most important to accept the internationally honoured HIA-principles: democracy, promotion of equality, objectivity, transparency, practicability and sustainability. Derived from international experience, the structural anchoring of HIA is important and includes especially

- » defining political responsibilities,
- » a clear appointment to carry out HIA,
- » providing necessary resources and
- » establishing an HIA Support Unit.

To promote necessary intersectoral co-operation, an interdepartmental HIA working group and the development of HIA agents per ministerial department were suggested. Thus, a common understanding of health can be created. By including HIA in other ministerial departments the importance of health will be strengthened. This has also positive impacts on the modern health system, which is more than medical treatment of patients.

In the Austrian health targets, HIA is mentioned as instrument for fostering HiAP (Health in All Policies). HiAP is an important approach regarding Public Health and is promoted by the Federal Ministry of Health and Women's Affairs. Considering HiAP, it has to be emphasised that introducing and implementing HIA as an instrument for (political) decision making is only possible within a



long-term process in Austria. To convince relevant stakeholders (political decision makers, potential clients and executing persons) of the meaning and benefits of this instrument, the Austrian concept includes an extensive phase of awareness building. Central element and driving force of this phase would be an HIA Support Unit with the tasks

- » concentrating necessary competences and experiences,
- » preparing the professional basis for the introduction of HIA in Austria and
- » adopting responsibility for measures necessary for awareness building.

Additionally, it is recommended to carry out some HIA-pilot projects in this phase. Thus, the benefit of HIA could be shown on the basis of concrete examples with particular Austrian background.

On national level, the HIA Support Unit has already developed some literature and material, e.g. a training concept and a guide to carry out HIA, etc. Furthermore, an HIA-pilot project about compulsory kindergarten education was carried out in 2012. In late 2015, a desktop HIA was done. The HIA Support Unit also produces a newsletter four times a year, operates a website (<http://gfa.goeg.at>) and organises meetings of the national HIA-network once per year. In 2013, an expert conference was organised together with other institutions.

A regional HIA-network has been established in Styria (one of Austria's provinces). There, some HIA-projects have been carried out on regional level (compare <http://gfa.goeg.at/Examples/National>). Styria is the only Austrian province which operates a regional HIA-network with regular meetings and organised the expert conference 2015 in Graz.